

Announcement

Chair in Genitourinary Medicine

A Chair in Genitourinary Medicine has been created at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London. An advertisement concerning this Chair appears on page VI.

The Academic Department of Genitourinary Medicine will have an establishment for a senior lecturer, lecturer, technician, and a secretary.

Funds to finance the Chair have been raised largely by voluntary contributions.

The full title of the Chair will be 'The Duncan

Guthrie Chair of Genitourinary Medicine at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London University'. It is named after Duncan Guthrie who, as Director of the National Fund for Research into Crippling Diseases, was instrumental in raising the necessary finance.

It is hoped that the first Professor will take up his post on 1 October 1978, the beginning of the academic year.

Editorial

Cultivation of *Treponema pallidum*

Most students of syphilis would give first priority, in a long list of research needs, to the cultivation of pathogenic *Treponema pallidum*. At the same time, hope of successful cultivation on artificial media has been accompanied by liberal dashes of caution in accepting rumours and even reports of success. The paper by Jones *et al.* (1976) despite its optimistic title, was greeted with muted cheers, for many questions remained unanswered. In this issue (pages 338–339), comes the dismaying report by Foster *et al.* (1977) of the Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, USA, who have been unable to repeat the results of Jones and his colleagues.

Failure to confirm previous reports is not in itself cause for undue pessimism, but when linked with many other unsuccessful attempts the burden of proof shifts back to the original proponents of the method. The principal question it seems is multiplication versus survival during the 10-day period of observation. It was shown by Nelson and Steinman (1948) 30 years ago that pathogenic *T. pallidum* would remain viable for two to three weeks. It was subsequently shown by Weber (1960) that survival was temperature dependent to a degree.

It is in the nature of scientists that they maintain a quiet optimism and restrained expectation concerning important but difficult unanswered biological questions. Modern technology is ever more in-

genious, ready to serve flashes of insight of the individual human mind. However in the beguiling phrase of lottery promoters 'You have to play to win', there are ever fewer recruits who choose to match their wits against the treponeme.

It would be useful for future workers in this field to have a full-scale review of the long list of efforts that have failed. Much of the work remains unreported, and it would be the task of a reviewer to add to published material the probings of workers of the past half-century before they are lost in the haze of time. Indeed from such efforts have come contributions which, while short of the original goal, have sparked significant advances in the treponemal field.

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References

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